

AFL-CIO

A new coronavirus, COVID-19, originating in Wuhan, China, has spread rapidly across the globe. While there is currently no evidence of widespread transmission in the United States, federal health officials have said that spread of the virus within the country is likely and we should prepare for severe disruptions to everyday life, raising a number of concerns for working people.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE VIRUS?

The COVID-19 virus is spreading from person to person, and there is now community transmission in the United States. It is still unclear if the virus lives on surfaces. There is evidence of transmission when people do not have symptoms, and there is some evidence to indicate that the virus is spread more easily than the flu. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, runny nose and shortness of breath—similar to flu symptoms. The virus can be fatal, with a higher risk of severe disease or death among older people, individuals with an underlying illness and those left unprotected.

Information on the outbreak is constantly evolving. See the links at the bottom of this page for the most up-to-date information.

WORKERS AT INCREASED RISK

Working people are at increased risk if they frequently interact with potentially infected or infected individuals. Workers who are at increased risk include:

- Health care workers;
- Emergency responders (e.g., law enforcement, firefighters, EMTs);
- Airline operations (e.g., pilots, flight attendants, other airport workers);
- Other transportation operations;
- Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) workers;
- Correctional workers;
- Educators;
- Cleaning workers;
- Workers who have been identified as “essential personnel” by their employers during an outbreak or quarantine; and
- Other workers with broad exposure to the public.

PRIORITIES FOR WORKERS AND UNIONS

- Comprehensive workplace plans to identify potential exposure routes, controls to mitigate risk and training procedures.
- Protections for different groups of workers, following the Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines.
- Policies to encourage sick workers to stay at home without the loss of pay, benefits, seniority or other benefits.
- Economic policies for unemployment scenarios, where people are not able to be at work or are required to work overtime to take care of patients.
- Emphasis on personal hygiene practices, hand-washing and respiratory etiquette.
- Adequate supplies of personal protective equipment, especially N95 respirators, and respirator fit testing.
- Protocols to clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Protocols in case of a workplace or community outbreak, including possible self-quarantine or workplace quarantine.
- Plans for supply shortages, triage, prioritization and other contingencies.
- Consult the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) before hosting and attending events or large gatherings. CDC recommendations may change as the situation evolves.

WHAT WE'RE DOING

- Working to increase federal funding for agencies involved in fighting the virus.
- Bringing a worker perspective to Congress as it considers responses to the virus.
- Stay tuned to the AFL-CIO webpage below for the latest developments.

MORE INFORMATION

- AFL-CIO: aflcio.org/covid-19
- U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration: osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19/index.html
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html
- World Health Organization: who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019